

Soulwork

**Interview
with
Murray Stein**

by John Powell



In an e-mail exchange with Murray Stein, I explored the themes of soul and soulwork with which he has become so strongly identified. I have felt free to distill meaning rather than quote verbatim, where appropriate. The soulwork is not literal minded, but is faithful to meaning. What I will try to do here is suggest where Murray's interpretation of soul leads for me and for a prospective future.

JP: I want to ask you where you see yourself within the landscape of analytic psychology. In the past two years, I've heard presentations by Jim Hollis, Lionel Corbett, Tom Kirsch and Jim Hillman--four very different orientations. You seem to be somewhere between classical Jungian and archetypal, but how would you describe your orientation?

MS: Today the classification of 'classical', 'developmental', and 'archetypal' doesn't really work very well. All analysts pretty much combine all of these perspectives (and more) in the contemporary clinical setting.

I was trained in Zurich (1969-73) and received what could be called a 'classical' Jungian training. At the same time, however, Jim Hillman was launching what would become 'archetypal psychology', and I worked with him in Zurich and afterwards in this area. I published some papers that could be construed as 'archetypal' during the 70's. When Andrew Samuels wrote 'Jung and the Post-Jungians' he actually classified me as a member of the 'archetypal' school. But in the meantime, I also became influenced by the English Jungians who were trained by Michael Fordham and sought to blend analytical psychology and object relations perspectives and methods. Moving to Chicago in 1976, I could not help being influenced also by Heinz Kohut and his followers in 'self psychology'.

When some of us began the Ghost Ranch conferences in 1983, the goal was to produce papers that were contemporary expressions of clinical work and thought

among Jungian analysts working today. The 10 volumes of papers that were published by Chiron Publications in the Chiron Clinical Series tell the story. Analytical psychology has managed to reach out and embrace many other perspectives and to include them in clinical writing and work. The result is that you can find analysts working today at any point along a wide spectrum from 'classical' to 'developmental'. The extremes are 'Jungian fundamentalists' on the one end of this spectrum and 'Jungian Kleinians' at the other end. But even they can dialogue with one another and indeed they share some fundamental convictions about the nature of the psyche, based on Jung's theory. Most analysts fall somewhere between these extremes, and most appreciate the value of having a variety of perspectives in the field.

So where do I stand? I use different approaches with different patients. My approach in an individual case depends entirely on a clinical judgement on my part about what will be best for this individual person. That judgement is rooted in a developmental perspective that draws most deeply on Jung's theory of individuation and Erich Neumann's extensions and amplifications of that theory, as well as on what I have gleaned from Klein, Kohut, Bion and many, many others.

JP: Let me lead into another topic: Much of the literature by Hillman for the past 20 years or so, and that influenced by him (Moore, Sardello, et al.) deals with "soul", "soul-making", "soulwork". I note that your coming lecture to our group deals with soul. Is this concept in danger of being swamped by popularization? Can we talk about soul with any precision?

MS: I remember first hearing Jim Hillman use the phrase 'soul-making'. He was quoting from Keats. I think he

had just discovered the poem or letter in which the Romantic poet coins this term. This was in the late 60's. A friend of his from the Jung Institute in Zurich, Angelou Christou, had earlier written a thesis at the Institute titled "The Logos of the Soul" and Jim published it shortly after Christou's accidental death in Egypt. I think they were picking up a strand in Jung's thought -- the anima piece -- and trying to take it further, to make it clinically relevant and also to bring it out of the consulting room into psychological life in the world. I continue to find this effort important, especially in a culture like ours that is so geared to technology and finance. I see this movement as a compensation, in the Jungian sense of the term, for cultural one-sidedness. Of course, the term can be banalized and lose its edge from over-use.

In my lecture, I am using the term in a somewhat more traditional way. It is the soul's transcendence that I want to reflect upon. After physical death, what remains? That's my question.

JP: Another phase of liminality?

MS: I can't say much about the soul's liminality in a possible afterlife existence, although there are ancient texts that speak of this (the Bardo state). I do know for a fact, however, that a liminal space opens up for people around the death experience. In this liminal space symbols appear that have an uncanniness about them. I won't say more now or you won't come to my talk. But I hope this much said whets the appetite.

(End of e-mail exchange.)

For further interpretation of "liminal space", see Stein's book [In Midlife](#), (1983) Dallas, Spring Publications. David Rosen, who presented to our Jung Society this winter on Elvis, also explores the liminality of near-death experience in his [Transforming Depression](#), (1993) New York, Tarcher/Putnam. Rosen studied the experience of suicide survivors, particularly those from Bay Area bridges.